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## HISTORY AS LITERATURE<sup>1</sup>

THERE has been much discussion as to whether history should not henceforth be treated as a branch of science rather than of literature. As with most such discussions, much of the matter in dispute has referred merely to terminology. Moreover, as regards part of the discussion, the minds of the contestants have not met, the propositions advanced by the two sides being neither mutually incompatible nor mutually relevant. There is, however, a real basis for conflict in so far as science claims exclusive possession of the field.

There was a time—we see it in the marvellous dawn of Hellenic life—when history was distinguished neither from poetry, from mythology, nor from the first dim beginnings of science. There was a more recent time, at the opening of Rome's brief period of literary splendor, when poetry was accepted by a great scientific philosopher as the appropriate vehicle for teaching the lessons of science and philosophy. There was a more recent time still—the time of Holland's leadership in arms and arts—when one of the two or three greatest world painters put his genius at the service of anatomists.

In each case the steady growth of specialization has rendered such combination now impossible. Virgil left history to Livy; and when Tacitus had become possible Lucan was a rather absurd anachronism. The elder Darwin, when he endeavored to combine the functions of scientist and poet, may have thought of Lucretius as a model; but the great Darwin was incapable of such a mistake. The surgeons of to-day would prefer the services of a good photographer to those of Rembrandt—even were those of Rembrandt available. No one would now dream of combining the history of the Trojan War with a poem on the wrath of Achilles. Beowulf's feats against the witch who dwelt under the water would not now be mentioned in the same matter-of-fact way that a Frisian or Frankish raid is mentioned. We are long past the stage when we would accept as parts of the same epic Siegfried's triumphs over dwarf and dragon, and even a distorted memory of the historic Hunnish king in whose feast-hall the Burgundian heroes held their last revel and made their death fight. We read of the loves of the

<sup>1</sup> Annual address of the president of the American Historical Association, delivered at Boston, December 27, 1912.

Hound of Muirthemne and Emer the Fair without attributing to the chariot-riding heroes who "fought over the ears of their horses" and to their fierce lady-loves more than a symbolic reality. The Roland of the Norman trouvères, the Roland who blew the ivory horn at Roncesvalles, is to our minds wholly distinct from the actual Warden of the Marches who fell in a rear-guard skirmish with the Pyrennean Basques.

As regards philosophy, as distinguished from material science and from history, the specialization has been incomplete. Poetry is still used as a vehicle for the teaching of philosophy. Goethe was as profound a thinker as Kant. He has influenced the thought of mankind far more deeply than Kant because he was also a great poet. Robert Browning was a real philosopher and his writings have had a hundredfold the circulation and the effect of those of any similar philosopher who wrote in prose, just because, and only because, what he wrote was not merely philosophy but literature. The form in which he wrote challenged attention and provoked admiration. That part of his work which some of us—which I myself for instance—most care for is merely poetry. But in that part of his work which has exercised most attraction and has given him the widest reputation, the poetry, the form of expression, bears to the thought expressed much the same relation that the expression of Lucretius bears to the thought of Lucretius. As regards this, the great mass of his product, he is primarily a philosopher, whose writings surpass in value those of other similar philosophers precisely because they are not only philosophy but literature. In other words, Browning the philosopher is read by countless thousands to whom otherwise philosophy would be a sealed book, for exactly the same reason that Macaulay the historian is read by countless thousands to whom otherwise history would be a sealed book; because both Browning's works and Macaulay's works are material additions to the great sum of English literature. Philosophy is a science just as history is a science. There is need in one case as in the other for vivid and powerful presentation of scientific matter in literary form.

This does not mean that there is the like need in the two cases. History can never be truthfully presented if the presentation is purely emotional. It can never be truthfully or usefully presented unless profound research, patient, laborious, painstaking, has preceded the presentation. No amount of self-communion and of pondering on the soul of mankind, no gorgeousness of literary imagery, can take the place of cool, serious, widely extended study. The vision of the great historian must be both wide and lofty. But

it must be sane, clear, and based on full knowledge of the facts and of their interrelations. Otherwise we get merely a splendid bit of serious romance writing, like Carlyle's *French Revolution*. Many hardworking students, alive to the deficiencies of this kind of romance writing, have grown to distrust, not only all historical writing that is romantic, but all historical writing that is vivid. They feel that complete truthfulness must never be sacrificed to color. In this they are right. They also feel that complete truthfulness is incompatible with color. In this they are wrong. The immense importance of full knowledge of a mass of dry facts and gray details has so impressed them as to make them feel that the dryness and the grayness are in themselves meritorious.

These students have rendered invaluable service to history. They are right in many of their contentions. They see how literature and science have specialized. They realize that scientific methods are as necessary to the proper study of history as to the proper study of astronomy or zoology. They know that in many, perhaps in most, of its forms, literary ability is divorced from the restrained devotion to the actual fact which is as essential to the historian as to the scientist. They know that nowadays science ostentatiously disclaims any connection with literature. They feel that if this is essential for science, it is no less essential for history.

There is much truth in all these contentions. Nevertheless, taking them all together, they do not indicate what these hard-working students believed that they indicate. Because history, science, and literature have all become specialized, the theory now is that science is definitely severed from literature and that history must follow suit. Not only do I refuse to accept this as true for history but I do not even accept it as true for science.

Literature may be defined as that which has permanent interest because both of its substance and its form, aside from the mere technical value that inheres in a special treatise for specialists. For a great work of literature there is the same demand now that there always has been; and in any great work of literature the first element is great imaginative power. The imaginative power demanded for a great historian is different from that demanded for a great poet; but it is no less marked. Such imaginative power is in no sense incompatible with minute accuracy. On the contrary, very accurate, very real and vivid, presentation of the past, can come only from one in whom the imaginative gift is strong. The industrious collector of dead facts bears to such a man precisely the relation that a photographer bears to Rembrandt. There are innumerable books, that is, innumerable volumes of printed matter between covers, which

are excellent for their own purposes, but in which imagination would be as wholly out of place as in the blue prints of a sewer system or in the photographs taken to illustrate a work on comparative osteology. But the vitally necessary sewer system does not take the place of the cathedral of Rheims or of the Parthenon; no quantity of photographs will ever be equivalent to one Rembrandt; and the greatest mass of data, although indispensable to the work of a great historian, is in no shape or way a substitute for that work.

History, taught for a directly and immediately useful purpose to pupils and the teachers of pupils, is one of the necessary features of a sound education in democratic citizenship. A book containing such sound teaching, even if without any literary quality, may be as useful to the student and as creditable to the writer, as a similar book on medicine. I am not slighting such a book when I say that once it has achieved its worthy purpose, it can be permitted to lapse from human memory as a good book on medicine, which has outlived its usefulness, lapses from memory. But the historical work which does possess literary quality may be a permanent contribution to the sum of man's wisdom, enjoyment, and inspiration. The writer of such a book must add wisdom to knowledge, and the gift of expression to the gift of imagination.

It is a shallow criticism to assert that imagination tends to inaccuracy. Only a distorted imagination tends to inaccuracy. Vast and fundamental truths can be discerned and interpreted only by one whose imagination is as lofty as the soul of a Hebrew prophet. When we say that the great historian must be a man of imagination, we use the word as we use it when we say that the great statesman must be a man of imagination. Moreover, together with imagination must go the power of expression. The great speeches of statesmen, and the great writings of historians can live only if they possess the deathless quality that inheres in all great literature. The greatest literary historian must of necessity be a master of the science of history, a man who has at his finger-tips all the accumulated facts from the treasure-houses of the dead past. But he must also possess the power to marshal what is dead so that before our eyes it lives again.

Many learned people seem to feel that the quality of readability in a book is one which warrants suspicion. Indeed, not a few learned people seem to feel that the fact that a book is interesting is proof that it is shallow. This is particularly apt to be the attitude of scientific men. Very few great scientists have written interestingly, and these few have usually felt apologetic about it. Yet sooner or later the time will come when the mighty sweep of modern

scientific discovery will be placed, by scientific men with the gift of expression, at the service of intelligent and cultivated laymen. Such service will be inestimable. Another writer of *Canterbury Tales*, another singer of *Paradise Lost*, could not add more to the sum of literary achievement than the man who may picture to us the phases of the age-long history of life on this globe, or make vivid before our eyes the tremendous march of the worlds through space.

Indeed, I believe that already science has owed more than it suspects to the unconscious literary power of some of its representatives. Scientific writers of note had grasped the fact of evolution long before Darwin and Huxley; and the theories advanced by these men to explain evolution were not much more unsatisfactory, as full explanations, than the theory of natural selection itself. Yet, where their predecessors had created hardly a ripple, Darwin and Huxley succeeded in effecting a complete revolution in the thought of the age, a revolution as great as that caused by the discovery of the truth about the solar system. I believe that the chief explanation of the difference was the very simple one that what Darwin and Huxley wrote was interesting to read. Every cultivated man soon had their volumes in his library, and they still keep their places on our bookshelves. But Lamarck and Cope are only to be found in the libraries of a few special students. If they had possessed a gift of expression akin to Darwin's, the doctrine of evolution would not in the popular mind have been confounded with the doctrine of natural selection and a juster estimate than at present would obtain as to the relative merits of the explanations of evolution championed by the different scientific schools.

Do not misunderstand me. In the field of historical research an immense amount can be done by men who have no literary power whatever. Moreover, the most painstaking and laborious research, covering long periods of years, is necessary in order to accumulate the material for any history worth writing at all. There are important by-paths of history, moreover, which hardly admit of treatment that would make them of interest to any but specialists. All this I fully admit. In particular I pay high honor to the patient and truthful investigator. He does an indispensable work. My claim is merely that such work should not exclude the work of the great master who can use the materials gathered, who has the gift of vision, the quality of the seer, the power himself to see what has happened and to make what he has seen clear to the vision of others. My only protest is against those who believe that the extension of the activities of the most competent mason and most energetic contractor will supply the lack of great architects. If, as in

the Middle Ages, the journeymen builders are themselves artists, why this is the best possible solution of the problem. But if they are not artists, then their work, however much it represents of praiseworthy industry, and of positive usefulness, does not take the place of the work of a great artist.

Take a concrete example. It is only of recent years that the importance of inscriptions has been realized. To the present-day scholar they are invaluable. Even to the layman, some of them turn the past into the present with startling clearness. The least imaginative is moved by the simple inscription on the Etruscan sarcophagus: "I, the great lady"; a lady so haughty that no other human being was allowed to rest near her; and yet now nothing remains but this proof of the pride of the nameless one. Or the inscription in which Queen Hatshepsut recounts her feats and her magnificence, and ends by abjuring the onlooker, when overcome by the recital, not to say "how wonderful" but "how like her!"—could any picture of a living queen be more intimately vivid? With such inscriptions before us the wonder is that it took us so long to realize their worth. Not unnaturally this realization, when it did come, was followed by the belief that inscriptions would enable us to dispense with the great historians of antiquity. This error is worse than the former. Where the inscriptions give us light on what would otherwise be darkness, we must be profoundly grateful; but we must not confound the lesser light with the greater. We could better afford to lose every Greek inscription that has ever been found than the chapter in which Thucydides tells of the Athenian failure before Syracuse. Indeed, few inscriptions teach us as much history as certain forms of literature that do not consciously aim at teaching history at all. The inscriptions of Hellenistic Greece in the third century before our era do not, all told, give us so lifelike a view of the ordinary life of the ordinary men and women who dwelt in the great Hellenistic cities of the time, as does the fifteenth idyll of Theocritus.

This does not mean that good history can be unscientific. So far from ignoring science, the great historian of the future can do nothing unless he is steeped in science. He can never equal what has been done by the great historians of the past unless he writes not merely with full knowledge, but with an intensely vivid consciousness, of all that of which they were necessarily ignorant. He must accept what we now know to be man's place in nature. He must realize that man has been on this earth for a period of such incalculable length that, from the standpoint of the student of his development through time, what our ancestors used to call "an-

tiquity" is almost indistinguishable from the present day. If our conception of history takes in the beast-like man whose sole tool and weapon was the stone fist-hatchet, and his advanced successors, the man who etched on bone pictures of the mammoth, the reindeer, and the wild horse, in what is now France, and the man who painted pictures of bison in the burial caves of what is now Spain; if we also conceive in their true position our "contemporaneous ancestors", the savages who are now no more advanced than the cave-dwellers of a hundred thousand or two hundred thousand years back, then we shall accept Thothmes and Caesar, Alfred and Washington, Timoleon and Lincoln, Homer and Shakespeare, Pythagoras and Emerson, as all nearly contemporaneous in time and in culture.

The great historian of the future will have easy access to innumerable facts patiently gathered by tens of thousands of investigators, whereas the great historian of the past had very few facts, and often had to gather most of these himself. The great historian of the future cannot be excused if he fails to draw on the vast storehouses of knowledge that have been accumulated, if he fails to profit by the wisdom and work of other men, which are now the common property of all intelligent men. He must use the instruments which the historians of the past did not have ready to hand. Yet even with these instruments he cannot do as good work as the best of the elder historians unless he has vision and imagination, the power to grasp what is essential and to reject the infinitely more numerous non-essentials, the power to embody ghosts, to put flesh and blood on dry bones, to make dead men living before our eyes. In short he must have the power to take the science of history and turn it into literature.

Those who wish history to be treated as a purely utilitarian science often decry the recital of the mighty deeds of the past, the deeds which always have aroused, and for a long period to come are likely to arouse, most interest. These men say that we should study not the unusual but the usual. They say that we profit most by laborious research into the drab monotony of the ordinary, rather than by fixing our eyes on the purple patches that break it. Beyond all question the great historian of the future must keep ever in mind the relative importance of the usual and the unusual. If he is a really great historian, if he possesses the highest imaginative and literary quality, he will be able to interest us in the gray tints of the general landscape no less than in the flame hues of the jutting peaks. It is even more essential to have such quality in writing of the commonplace than in writing of the exceptional. Otherwise no profit will come from study of the ordinary; for writings are useless



unless they are read, and they cannot be read unless they are readable. Furthermore, while doing full justice to the importance of the usual, of the commonplace, the great historian will not lose sight of the importance of the heroic.

It is hard to tell just what it is that is most important to know. The wisdom of one generation may seem the folly of the next. This is just as true of the wisdom of the dry-as-dusts as of the wisdom of those who write interestingly. Moreover, while the value of the by-products of knowledge does not readily yield itself to quantitative expression, it is none the less real. A utilitarian education should undoubtedly be the foundation of all education. But it is far from advisable, it is far from wise, to have it the end of all education. Technical training will more and more be accepted as the prime factor in our educational system, a factor as essential for the farmer, the blacksmith, the seamstress, and the cook, as for the lawyer, the doctor, the engineer, and the stenographer. For similar reasons the purely practical and technical lessons of history, the lessons that help us to grapple with our immediate social and industrial problems, will also receive greater emphasis than ever before. But if we are wise we will no more permit this practical training to exclude knowledge of that part of literature which is history than of that part of literature which is poetry. Side by side with the need for the perfection of the individual in the technique of his special calling goes the need of broad human sympathy, and the need of lofty and generous emotion in that individual. Only thus can the citizenship of the modern state rise level to the complex modern social needs.

No technical training, no narrowly utilitarian study of any kind will meet this second class of needs. In part they can best be met by a training that will fit men and women to appreciate, and therefore to profit by, great poetry, and those great expressions of the historian and the statesman which rivet our interest and stir our souls. Great thoughts match and inspire heroic deeds. The same reasons that make the Gettysburg speech and the Second Inaugural impress themselves on men's minds far more deeply than technical treatises on the constitutional justification of slavery or of secession, apply to fitting descriptions of the great battle and the great contest which occasioned the two speeches. The tense epic of the Gettysburg fight, the larger epic of the whole Civil War, when truthfully and vividly portrayed, will always have, and ought always to have, an attraction, an interest, that cannot be roused by the description of the same number of hours or years of ordinary existence. There are supreme moments in which intensity and not duration is the all-important element. History which is not professedly utilitarian,

history which is didactic only as great poetry is unconsciously didactic, may yet possess that highest form of usefulness, the power to thrill the souls of men with stories of strength and craft and daring, and to lift them out of their common selves to the heights of high endeavor.

The greatest historian should also be a great moralist. It is no proof of impartiality to treat wickedness and goodness as on the same level. But of course the obsession of purposeful moral teaching may utterly defeat its own aim. Moreover, unfortunately, the avowed teacher of morality, when he writes history, sometimes goes very far wrong indeed. It often happens that the man who can be of real help in inspiring others by his utterances on abstract principles is wholly unable to apply his own principles to concrete cases. Carlyle offers an instance in point. Very few men have ever been a greater source of inspiration to other ardent souls than was Carlyle when he confined himself to preaching morality in the abstract. Moreover his theory bade him treat history as offering material to support that theory. But not only was he utterly unable to distinguish either great virtues or great vices when he looked abroad on contemporary life—as witness his attitude toward our own Civil War—but he was utterly unable to apply his own principles concretely in history. His *Frederick the Great* is literature of a high order. It may, with reservations, even be accepted as history. But the “morality” therein jubilantly upheld is shocking to any man who takes seriously Carlyle’s other writings in which he lays down principles of conduct. In his *Frederick the Great* he was not content to tell the facts. He was not content to announce his admiration. He wished to square himself with his theories, and to reconcile what he admired, both with the actual fact and with his previously expressed convictions on morality. He could only do so by refusing to face the facts and by using words with meanings that shifted to meet his own mental emergencies. He pretended to discern morality where no vestige of it existed. He tortured the facts to support his views. The “morality” he praised had no connection with morality as understood in the New Testament. It was the kind of archaic morality observed by the Danites in their dealings with the people of Laish. The sermon of the Mormon bishop in Owen Wister’s “Pilgrim on the Gila” sets forth the only moral lessons which it was possible for Carlyle truthfully to draw from the successes he described.

History must not be treated as something set off by itself. It should not be treated as a branch of learning bound to the past by the shackles of an iron conservatism. It is neither necessary rigidly

to mark the limits of the province of history, nor to treat of all that is within that province, nor to exclude any subject within that province from treatment, nor yet to treat different methods of dealing with the same subject as mutually exclusive. Every writer and every reader has his own needs, to meet himself or to be met by others. Among a great multitude of thoughtful people there is room for the widest possible variety of appeals. Let each man fearlessly choose what is of real importance and interest to him personally, reverencing authority, but not in a superstitious spirit, because he must needs reverence liberty even more.

There is an infinite variety of subjects to treat, and no need to estimate their relative importance. Because one man is interested in the history of finance, it does not mean that another is wrong in being interested in the history of war. One man's need is met by exhaustive tables of statistics; another's by the study of the influence exerted on national life by the great orators, the Websters and Burkes, or by the poets, the Tyrtaeuses and Koerners, who in crises utter what is in the nation's heart. There is need of the study of the historical workings of representative government. There is no less need of the study of the economic changes produced by the factory system. Because we study with profit what Thorold Rogers wrote of prices we are not debarred from also profiting by Mahan's studies of naval strategy. One man finds what is of most importance to his own mind and heart in tracing the effect upon humanity of the spread of malaria along the shores of the Aegean; or the effect of the Black Death on the labor-market of medieval Europe; or the profound influence upon the development of the African continent of the fatal diseases borne by the bites of insects, which close some districts to human life and others to the beasts without which humanity rests at the lowest stage of savagery. One man sees the events from one viewpoint, one from another. Yet another can combine both. We can be stirred by Thayer's study of Cavour without abating our pleasure in the younger Trevelyan's volumes on Garibaldi. Because we revel in Froissart, or Joinville, or Villehardouin, there is no need that we should lack interest in the books that attempt the more difficult task of tracing the economic changes in the status of peasant, mechanic, and burgher during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

History must welcome the entrance upon its domain of every science. As James Harvey Robinson in his *New History* has said:

The bounds of all departments of human research and speculation are inherently provisional, indefinite, and fluctuating; moreover, the lines of demarcation are hopelessly interlaced, for real men and the real universe

in which they live are so intricate as to defy all attempts even of the most patient and subtle German to establish satisfactorily and permanently the *Begriff und Wesen* of any artificially delimited set of natural phenomena, whether words, thoughts, deeds, forces, animals, plants, or stars. Each so-called science or discipline is ever and always dependent on other sciences and disciplines. It draws its life from them, and to them it owes, consciously or unconsciously, a great part of its chances of progress.

Elsewhere this writer dwells on the need of understanding the genetic side of history, if we are to grasp the real meaning of, and grapple most effectively with, the phenomena of our present-day lives; for that which is can be dealt with best if we realize at least in part from what a tangled web of causation it has sprung.

The work of the archaeologist, the work of the anthropologist, the work of the palaeo-ethnologist—out of all these a great literary historian may gather material indispensable for his use. He, and we, ought fully to acknowledge our debt to the collectors of these indispensable facts. The investigator in any line may do work which puts us all under lasting obligations to him, even though he be totally deficient in the art of literary expression, that is, totally deficient in the ability to convey vivid and lifelike pictures to others of the past whose secrets he has laid bare. I would give no scanty or grudging acknowledgment to the deeds of such a man. He does a lasting service; whereas the man who tries to make literary expression cover his ignorance or misreading of facts renders less than no service. But the service done is immeasurably increased in value when the man arises who from his study of a myriad dead fragments is able to paint some living picture of the past.

This is why the record as great writers preserve it has a value immeasurably beyond what is merely lifeless. Such a record pulses with immortal life. It may recount the deed or the thought of a hero at some supreme moment. It may be merely the portrayal of homely every-day life. This matters not, so long as in either event the genius of the historian enables him to paint in colors that do not fade. The cry of the Ten Thousand when they first saw the sea still stirs the hearts of men. The ruthless death scene between Jehu and Jezebel; wicked Ahab, smitten by the chance arrow, and propped in his chariot until he died at sundown; Josiah, losing his life because he would not heed the Pharaoh's solemn warning, and mourned by all the singing men and all the singing women—the fates of these kings and of this king's daughter, are part of the common stock of knowledge of mankind. They were petty rulers of petty principalities; yet, compared with them, mighty conquerors, who added empire to empire, Shalmaneser and Sargon, Amenhotep and

Rameses, are but shadows; for the deeds and the deaths of the kings of Judah and Israel are written in words that, once read, cannot be forgotten. The Peloponnesian War bulks of unreal size to-day because it once seemed thus to bulk to a master mind. Only a great historian can fittingly deal with a very great subject; yet because the qualities of chief interest in human history can be shown on a small field no less than on a large one, some of the greatest historians have treated subjects that only their own genius rendered great.

So true is this that if great events lack a great historian, and a great poet writes about them, it is the poet who fixes them in the mind of mankind, so that in after-time importance the real has become the shadow and the shadow the reality. Shakespeare has definitely fixed the character of the Richard III. of whom ordinary men think and speak. Keats forgot even the right name of the man who first saw the Pacific Ocean; yet it is his lines which leap to our minds when we think of the "wild surmise" felt by the indomitable explorer-conqueror from Spain when the vast new sea burst on his vision.

When, however, the great historian has spoken, his work will never be undone. No poet can ever supersede what Napier wrote of the storming of Badajoz, of the British infantry at Albuera, and of the light artillery at Fuentes d'Oñoro. After Parkman had written of Montcalm and Wolfe there was left for other writers only what Fitzgerald left for other translators of Omar Khayyam. Much new light has been thrown on the history of the Byzantine Empire by the many men who have studied it of recent years; we read each new writer with pleasure and profit; and after reading each we take down a volume of Gibbon, with renewed thankfulness that a great writer was moved to do a great task.

The greatest of future archaeologists will be the great historian who instead of being a mere antiquarian delver in dust heaps has the genius to reconstruct for us the immense panorama of the past. He must possess knowledge. He must possess that without which knowledge is of so little use, wisdom. What he brings from the charnel-house he must use with such potent wizardry that we shall see the life that was and not the death that is. For remember that the past was life just as much as the present is life. Whether it be Egypt, or Mesopotamia, or Scandinavia with which he deals, the great historian, if the facts permit him, will put before us the men and women as they actually lived so that we shall recognize them for what they were, living beings. Men like Maspero, Breasted, and Weigall have already begun this work for the countries of the Nile and the Euphrates. For Scandinavia the groundwork was laid long

ago in the *Heimskringla* and in such sagas as those of Burnt Njal and Gisli Soursop. Minute descriptions of mummies and of the furniture of tombs help us as little to understand the Egypt of the mighty days, as to sit inside the tomb of Mount Vernon would help us to see Washington the soldier leading to battle his scarred and tattered veterans, or Washington the statesman, by his serene strength of character, rendering it possible for his countrymen to establish themselves as one great nation.

The great historian must be able to paint for us the life of the plain people, the ordinary men and women, of the time of which he writes. He can do this only if he possesses the highest kind of imagination. Collections of figures no more give us a picture of the past than the reading of a tariff report on hides or woollens gives us an idea of the actual lives of the men and women who live on ranches or work in factories. The great historian will in as full measure as possible present to us the every-day life of the men and women of the age which he describes. Nothing that tells of this life will come amiss to him. The instruments of their labor and the weapons of their warfare, the wills that they wrote, the bargains that they made, and the songs that they sang when they feasted and made love; he must use them all. He must tell us of the toil of the ordinary man in ordinary times, and of the play by which that ordinary toil was broken. He must never forget that no event stands out entirely isolated. He must trace from its obscure and humble beginnings each of the movements that in its hour of triumph has shaken the world.

Yet he must not forget that the times that are extraordinary need especial portrayal. In the revolt against the old tendency of historians to deal exclusively with the spectacular and the exceptional, to treat only of war and oratory and government, many modern writers have gone to the opposite extreme. They fail to realize that in the lives of nations as in the lives of men there are hours so fraught with weighty achievement, with triumph or defeat, with joy or sorrow, that each such hour may determine all the years that are to come thereafter, or may outweigh all the years that have gone before. In the writings of our historians, as in the lives of our ordinary citizens, we can neither afford to forget that it is the ordinary every-day life which counts most; nor yet that seasons come when ordinary qualities count for but little in the face of great contending forces of good and of evil, the outcome of whose strife determines whether the nation shall walk in the glory of the morning or in the gloom of spiritual death.

The historian must deal with the days of common things, and

deal with them so that they shall interest us in reading of them as our own common things interest us as we live among them. He must trace the changes that come almost unseen, the slow and gradual growth that transforms for good or for evil the children and grandchildren so that they stand high above or far below the level on which their forefathers stood. He must also trace the great cataclysms that interrupt and divert this gradual development. He can no more afford to be blind to one class of phenomena than to the other. He must ever remember that while the worst offense of which he can be guilty is to write vividly and inaccurately, yet that unless he writes vividly he cannot write truthfully; for no amount of dull, painstaking detail will sum up as the whole truth unless the genius is there to paint the truth.

There can be no better illustration of what I mean than is afforded by the history of Russia during the last thousand years. The historian must trace the growth of the earliest Slav communities of the forest and the steppe, the infiltration of Scandinavian invaders who gave them their first power of mass action, and the slow, chaotic development of the little communes into barbarous cities and savage princedoms. In later Russian history he must show us priest and noble, merchant and serf, changing slowly from the days when Ivan the Terrible warred against Bátorý, the Magyar king of Poland, until the present moment, when with half-suspicious eyes the people of the Czar watch their remote Bulgarian kinsmen standing before the last European stronghold of the Turk. During all these centuries there were multitudes of wars, foreign and domestic, any or all of which were of little moment compared to the slow working of the various forces that wrought in the times of peace. But there was one period of storm and overthrow so terrible that it affected profoundly for all time the whole growth of the Russian people, in inmost character no less than in external dominion. Early in the thirteenth century the genius of Jenghiz Khan stirred the Mongol horsemen of the mid-Asian pastures to a movement as terrible to civilization as the lava flow of a volcano to the lands around the volcano's foot. When that century opened, the Mongols were of no more weight in the world than the Touaregs of the Sahara are to-day. Long before the century had closed they had ridden from the Yellow Sea to the Adriatic and the Persian Gulf. They had crushed Christian and Moslem and Buddhist alike beneath the iron cruelty of their sway. They had conquered China as their successors conquered India. They sacked Baghdad, the seat of the Khalif. In mid-Europe their presence for a moment caused the same horror to fall on the warring adherents of the pope and the kaiser. To

Europe they were a scourge so frightful, so irresistible, that the people cowered before them as if they had been demons. No European army of that day, of any nation, was able to look them in the face on a stricken field. Bestial in their lives, irresistible in battle, merciless in victory, they trampled the lands over which they rode into bloody mire beneath the hoofs of their horses. The squat, slit-eyed, brawny horse-bowmen drew a red furrow across Hungary, devastated Poland, and in Silesia overthrew the banded chivalry of Germany. But it was in Russia that they did their worst. They not merely conquered Russia, but held the Russians as cowering and abject serfs for two centuries. Every feeble effort at resistance was visited with such bloodthirsty vengeance that finally no Russian ventured ever to oppose them at all. But the princes of the cities soon found that the beast-like fury of the conquerors when their own desires were thwarted, was only equalled by their beast-like indifference to all that was done among the conquered people themselves, and that they were ever ready to hire themselves out to aid each Russian against his brother. Under this régime the Russian who rose was the Russian who with cringing servility to his Tartar overlords combined ferocious and conscienceless greed in the treatment of his fellow-Russians. Moscow came to the front by using the Tartar to help conquer the other Russian cities, paying as a price abject obedience to all Tartar demands. In the long run the fierce and pliant cunning of the conquered people proved too much for the short-sighted and arrogant brutality of the conquerors. The Tartar power, the Mongolian power, waned. Russia became united, threw off the yoke, and herself began a career of aggression at the expense of her former conquerors. But the reconquest of racial independence, vitally necessary though it was to Russia, had been paid for by the establishment of a despotism Asiatic rather than European in its spirit and working.

The true historian will bring the past before our eyes as if it were the present. He will make us see as living men the hard-faced archers of Agincourt, and the war-worn spearmen who followed Alexander down beyond the rim of the known world. We shall hear grate on the coast of Britain the keels of the Low-Dutch sea-thieves whose children's children were to inherit unknown continents. We shall thrill to the triumphs of Hannibal. Gorgeous in our sight will rise the splendor of dead cities, and the might of the elder empires of which the very ruins crumbled to dust ages ago. Along ancient trade routes, across the world's waste spaces, the caravans shall move; and the admirals of uncharted seas shall furrow the oceans with their lonely prows. Beyond the dim centuries



we shall see the banners float above armed hosts. We shall see conquerors riding forward to victories that have changed the course of time. We shall listen to the prophecies of forgotten seers. Ours shall be the dreams of dreamers who dreamed greatly, who saw in their vision peaks so lofty that never yet have they been reached by the sons and daughters of men. Dead poets shall sing to us the deeds of men of might and the love and the beauty of women. We shall see the dancing girls of Memphis. The scent of the flowers in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon will be heavy to our senses. We shall sit at feast with the kings of Nineveh when they drink from ivory and gold. With Queen Maeve in her sun parlor we shall watch the nearing chariots of the champions. For us the war-horns of King Olaf shall wail across the flood, and the harps sound high at festivals in forgotten halls. The frowning strongholds of the barons of old shall rise before us, and the white palace-castles from whose windows Syrian princes once looked across the blue Aegean. We shall know the valor of the two-sworded Samurai. Ours shall be the hoary wisdom and the strange, crooked folly of the immemorial civilizations which tottered to a living death in India and in China. We shall see the terrible horsemen of Timur the Lame ride over the roof of the world; we shall hear the drums beat as the armies of Gustavus and Frederick and Napoleon drive forward to victory. Ours shall be the woe of burgher and peasant, and ours the stern joy when freemen triumph and justice comes to her own. The agony of the galley-slaves shall be ours, and the rejoicing when the wicked are brought low and the men of evil days have their reward. We shall see the glory of triumphant violence, and the revel of those who do wrong in high places; and the broken-hearted despair that lies beneath the glory and the revel. We shall also see the supreme righteousness of the wars for freedom and justice, and know that the men who fell in these wars made all mankind their debtors.

Some day the historians will tell us of these things. Some day, too, they will tell our children of the age and the land in which we now live. They will portray the conquest of the continent. They will show the slow beginnings of settlement, the growth of the fishing and trading towns on the seacoast, the hesitating early ventures into the Indian-haunted forest. Then they will show the backwoodsmen, with their long rifles and their light axes, making their way with labor and peril through the wooded wilderness to the Mississippi; and then the endless march of the white-topped wagon-trains across plain and mountain to the coast of the greatest of the five great oceans. They will show how the land which the pioneers won

slowly and with incredible hardship was filled in two generations by the overflow from the countries of western and central Europe. The portentous growth of the cities will be shown, and the change from a nation of farmers to a nation of business men and artisans, and all the far-reaching consequences of the rise of the new industrialism. The formation of a new ethnic type in this melting-pot of the nations will be told. The hard materialism of our age will appear, and also the strange capacity for lofty idealism which must be reckoned with by all who would understand the American character. A people whose heroes are Washington and Lincoln, a peaceful people who fought to a finish one of the bloodiest of wars, waged solely for the sake of a great principle and a noble idea, surely possess an emergency standard far above mere money-getting.

Those who tell the Americans of the future what the Americans of to-day and of yesterday have done, will perforce tell much that is unpleasant. This is but saying that they will describe the arch-typical civilization of this age. Nevertheless when the tale is finally told, I believe that it will show that the forces working for good in our national life outweigh the forces working for evil, and that, with many blunders and shortcomings, with much halting and turning aside from the path, we shall yet in the end prove our faith by our works, and show in our lives our belief that righteousness exalteth a nation.

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